United Nations E/CN.6/2015/INF/1

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
16 March 2015

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session
9-20 March 2015
Agenda item 3
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Ministerial round table: making the economy work for women and girls

Chair's summary

1. On 10 March 2015, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the topic "Making the economy work for women and girls" under the overall theme "Priorities for future action to realize gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights of women and girls". The participants in the round table focused on the current challenges in the economic sphere for women and the way forward in achieving economic equality for women and girls to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

2. The Federal Minister of Welfare and Social Security of the Sudan, Mashaair Ahmed Elamin Aldawalab, chaired the round table and the General Secretary of the International Domestic Workers Federation, Elizabeth Tang, served as moderator. The meeting opened with brief introductions by the Chair and the Moderator. Ministers and high-level officials from 19 States Members of the United Nations participated in the round table.

Addressing the barriers to women's economic empowerment

3. All participants confirmed that gender equality and women's economic empowerment continued to be a national priority. Participants recognized the strong link between women's participation in the labour force and positive economic and social outcomes and, consequently, the need for women to have access to decent work. However, participants also identified a number of key challenges that continued to hinder progress for women and girls in the economic domain.

15-04019 (E) 180315

Please recycle

4. According to participants, a major barrier to women's economic empowerment continued to be structural inequalities, which were rooted in restrictive social norms and institutions and in discriminatory laws and practices affecting women's access to work and their rights at work. One particular concern raised by many participants was the unequal sharing of domestic and care work. The burden of unpaid work continued to be borne disproportionately by women. Ministers underlined the need for policies that supported better work-life balance and sharing of care responsibilities, in particular childcare, between men and women, and gave examples of good practices in that regard. Paid parental leave, flexible work arrangements, State subsidies and allowances and affordable childcare were mentioned as ways to address that issue. Targeted initiatives that encouraged men to share family responsibilities, for example through allowances and bonuses when fathers took parental leave, were also mentioned.

5. Participants acknowledged gender disparities in pay as a major impediment to women's economic empowerment. Women often remained confined to the least remunerative and least protected segments of the formal and informal economy, which contributed to the persistence of the gender pay gap. While participants welcomed the significant progress in improving women's access to education, those gains had not translated into sufficient economic empowerment for women. Ministers were therefore concerned that women continued to be underrepresented at the senior management and executive levels in both the private and public sectors. A number of participants described efforts to increase women's participation in top decision-making structures, including through mandatory quotas for women on corporate boards.

6. Several participants highlighted the challenges in improving conditions for the informal labour force, which was disproportionately made up of women. Speakers pointed out that women who worked in the informal economy often lived in poverty, lacked access to social protection and were unable to realize their economic and social rights. As their working conditions were unregulated, workers in the informal sector were often subjected to exploitation and violence, with little or no access to remedies. Participants highlighted the important role of labour laws and institutions in protecting women's rights at work, and of efforts to expand such protection and benefits to women working in the informal economy.

Enhancing women's access to resources, markets and economic opportunities

7. Participants stated that women's economic empowerment was being held back by pervasive gender disparities in access to and ownership of land, resources, technology and agricultural inputs. Such disparities in access were exacerbated and compounded by shocks, such as the economic and financial crises and environmental disasters of recent years. Women workers and entrepreneurs also faced barriers in access to markets, including to production chains with significant value in exports. To rectify some of those disparities, speakers provided examples of laws and policies aimed at increasing women's access to productive resources in general, as well as of targeted efforts, such as dedicating portions of arable agricultural land specifically to women.

8. In a number of countries, creating public sector employment opportunities for women was a priority. Efforts were also being made to increase women's economic opportunities in the public sector, with participants giving examples of affirmative

action policies, including in procurement procedures, as successful strategies to increase women's engagement in and sourcing for the public sector.

9. Participants acknowledged the urgency of increasing women's participation in sectors that had traditionally been male-dominated and drew particular attention to the science, engineering and technology sectors. Participants called for investment in skills and vocational training for women in those industries.

10. Ministers emphasized the importance of supporting women's entrepreneurship as a strategy to promote their economic empowerment. A number of national measures were mentioned, including improving access to formal credit and productive assets, creating tax incentives for women-owned enterprises, supporting women's agricultural production and providing business-related training opportunities. In some instances, such measures were combined with childcare benefits for parents participating in vocational training. Participants also highlighted the importance of creating mentorship networks aimed at fostering women's entrepreneurship, as well as initiatives that encouraged public-private partnerships.

Ensuring an enabling economic policy environment

11. Participants discussed the lack of gender sensitivity of macroeconomic policies and public sector reforms enacted in the wake of the 2007 and 2008 global economic and financial crisis. Speakers noted that austerity measures often had a greater impact on women who relied on the State for social services and employment, and stressed the need for greater attention to such imbalance in economic policymaking, for both economic and social reasons. In addition, participants noted that a narrow focus on raising the gross domestic product contributed to gender inequalities in the economy being overlooked, thereby limiting support for women workers and entrepreneurs.

12. In relation to macroeconomic policies, participants also noted the gender-specific impacts of investments in infrastructure and therefore the need for gender-responsive infrastructure policies. Investment in electrification was cited as key for enabling women to allocate time to engage in income-generating activities instead of to fetching water and wood.. Lack of transportation was another barrier for women to access employment opportunities. Women's economic empowerment therefore required greater attention to gender perspectives in infrastructure and transport policies.

13. Additional areas requiring attention to make the economy work for women were gender-responsive budgeting and national planning processes to ensure that macroeconomic policies supported gender equality. National action plans for gender equality could be used effectively to promote such efforts. Participants agreed on the importance of sex-disaggregated data to inform gender-responsive economic policymaking.

United Nations E/CN.6/2015/INF/2

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
16 March 2015

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session
9-20 March 2015
Agenda item 3
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Ministerial round table: investing in gender equality and the empowerment of women

Chair's summary

1. On 10 March 2015, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the topic "Investing in gender equality and the empowerment of women" under the overall theme "Priorities for future action to realize gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights of women and girls". The participants in the round table focused on current challenges and the way forward in financing for gender equality to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

2. The round table was chaired by the Deputy Foreign Minister of Estonia, Marina Kaljurand, and was moderated by the Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning, Amina Mohammed. In total, 25 ministers and high-level officials participated in the round table.

Strategies to increase investments in gender equality

3. All participants confirmed the importance of investing in gender equality and women's empowerment. Many expressed concern about remaining gaps in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, and all called for increased financing and investment for gender equality to ensure a full and effective implementation. Participants highlighted the particular significance of increasing investments in gender equality in the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

4. Participants stressed the significance of domestic resource mobilization for the adequate and effective allocation of those resources towards gender equality. Mainstreaming and institutionalizing gender equality in government planning and budgeting processes were considered an urgent priority. Many participants reported

Please recycle

that gender-responsive budgeting was an effective strategy that had resulted in increased financing to implement gender equality commitments. Participants emphasized the important role of the ministries of finance and of planning in achieving such gains. Strategies to strengthen gender-responsive budgeting at both the national and local levels included the regular analysis of gender issues in budgets at all levels, the audit of budget expenditures and the assessment of the impact of public spending on gender equality. Participants also highlighted the importance of progressive tax measures that did not discriminate against women. According to participants, further efforts were required to strengthen the technical capacity of governmental institutions to draw up gender-responsive budgets. Stronger collaboration was needed across governmental departments responsible for gender equality, planning and financing to enable the effective planning, budgeting and implementation of gender equality policies.

5. Several participants drew attention to the need to strengthen the monitoring of public spending, for instance through open budgets and budget audits, gender analyses and the assessment of policy impact. They highlighted the need for increased resources, coordination and capacity-building for the collection, dissemination and use of sex-disaggregated data. They recommended that a central body collect data in accordance with global gender indicators. An example of the role that civil society could play in monitoring and providing oversight of government programmes was provided. Participants encouraged the sharing of good practices to facilitate the scaling-up of programmes and initiatives from the local to the national levels, as well as among countries.

6. Participants emphasized the importance of development cooperation to support countries in meeting gender equality commitments, through North-South cooperation, in particular official development assistance. They believed that, while there had been a positive trend in the total volume of donor aid commitments targeting gender equality and women's empowerment, there remained significant funding gaps in critical areas of importance to women and girls, notably in their economic empowerment and in ending violence against women. To ensure that funding addressed those gaps, participants called for strengthened capacity-building, technical assistance and comprehensive systems to monitor the total amount of official development assistance allocated to gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the funding allocation in key sectors. In that regard, there was a call for greater support to developing countries by the United Nations system, including the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). Participants stressed that all donor support should be aligned with national development priorities, plans and strategies, emphasizing the accountability of donors. Speakers acknowledged the emerging role of South-South and triangular cooperation in facilitating the sharing of experiences and good practices.

7. Participants also drew attention to the role of the private sector in supporting investments for gender equality, including in partnership with the public sector. Some participants noted the need for the private sector to be fully aligned with national priorities on gender equality and emphasized the importance for private actors to adhere to the principles of transparency and accountability for gender equality. Participants highlighted the role of civil society organizations as advocates and in service delivery and stated that their participation in key decision-making processes should be strengthened.

An enabling policy and legislative environment

8. The development and full implementation of gender equality policies and strategies to address persistent gaps were identified as a priority. Participants stated that such frameworks were instrumental in articulating gender equality priorities at the national level, linking them with policy and planning, and monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and that their implementation needed to be fully funded. National machineries for gender equality were considered particularly important, with several participants underlining the need for clear mandates, adequate resources and strengthened capacity to deliver results. Participants acknowledged the need for other governmental agencies, including line ministries, to work in close collaboration with national machineries to pursue gender equality. Participants also highlighted the need for better alignment between gender equality policies and national development strategies.

9. Several participants mentioned that, in many countries, discriminatory or inadequate legislation was a major obstacle for overcoming gender inequality. A number of good practices were shared that included reforms in tax systems, changes in budgetary laws, increased quotas for women's participation, mandatory budget allocations and favourable amendments to constitutions and family laws.

Priority actions for the future

10. Several priority actions were identified for accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the area of financing for gender equality. All participants agreed that Governments required increased resources for closing the gap between commitments and implementation. Ministers noted that resources should be focused on achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women, but that a particular emphasis should be put on women-headed households, women in conflict situations and rural women.

11. Opportunities for raising resources included government action through progressive tax policies and the efficient allocation of those resources to priority actions for ensuring gender equality, such as the provision of basic public services and social protection. Ministers identified the need to increase the capacity to develop and implement gender-responsive plans and budgets that yielded such results for women and girls. Similarly, strengthening mechanisms to monitor public spending and programme impact, including through the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data, was identified as a priority area.

12. Participants emphasized the need for donors to meet their official development assistance commitments and to ensure that aid allocations targeted critical gap areas and were aligned with national development priorities, plans and strategies. Information on aid allocations to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women should be made available and accessible. Participants underlined that donors and United Nations agencies should continue to provide technical support to countries for the institutionalization of gender-sensitive policies, plans and budgets. Looking ahead to the post-2015 development framework, participants called on all actors to work together to address gender inequality, including by building multi-stakeholder partnerships.

United Nations E/CN.6/2015/INF/3

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
16 March 2015

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session
9-20 March 2015
Agenda item 3
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Ministerial round table: transforming politics and public life to achieve gender equality

Chair's summary

1. On 10 March 2015, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the topic "Transforming politics and public life to achieve gender equality" under the overall theme "Priorities for future action to realize gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights of women and girls". The participants in the round table focused on challenges in enhancing women's participation in decision-making and the way forward to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

2. The round table was chaired by the Director of the Institute for the Development of Women of El Salvador, Yanira Argueta, and moderated by the former Prime Minister of Senegal, Aminata Touré. In total, 29 ministers and high-level officials participated in the round table.

Strengthening women's participation, starting with political will

3. Participants confirmed the importance of institutional transformation to achieve gender equality in decision-making and leadership. They acknowledged that political will was necessary to ensure gender equality and noted that commitments and declarations had to be accompanied by actions and mechanisms to boost the participation and leadership of women.

4. A number of participants commented on the use of temporary special measures, including quotas, as a primary mechanism to increase women's political opportunities. High percentages of women in parliament were due in part to the implementation of quotas, although those worked best when supplemented by other measures, such as the reform of the electoral system; encouraging more transparent

Please recycle

elections and ensuring the establishment of independent electoral commissions; and applying sanctions, including financial penalties, for non-compliance with quota legislation. Participants also discussed the financing of women's electoral campaigns.

5. A number of participants spoke of the importance of women's leadership and participation in other institutions and entities, including corporate boards, trade unions and business associations. Quotas were seen as an effective way of ensuring women's presence, with some States requiring that women constitute at least 30 per cent of corporate boards.

6. The role of political parties was discussed, as was the need to ensure women's increased participation, including by strategically positioning women in winnable positions on their candidate lists, or by supporting their campaigns through party funds. Some participants pointed to the need for greater transparency in the internal functioning of parties, for promoting gender equality more systematically through their structures and for party leaders to be trained in gender equality issues. In States where women were currently not represented at all in elected positions, or where they were significantly underrepresented, constitutional amendments were being considered to boost women's electoral prospects. In other States, there was an increasing trend to work towards parity between men and women.

7. In addition to the implementation of quotas, participants raised the need to run awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of women's electoral and political participation. The importance of working with men and boys to advance gender equality was also underscored. Some participants stressed the need to strengthen solidarity among women.

8. Participants also stressed the need to build the capacity of women to participate in politics. The importance of universal education policies and the economic empowerment of women was underlined. Participants mentioned the need to enhance women's political skills at all levels of government and to create incentives for women's leadership at the subnational level.

9. The role of women's organizations at the grassroots level was highlighted in nurturing the interest and activism of women in politics, but also in holding Governments accountable for their commitments to increase the participation of women. Participants stressed the need to develop indicators and statistics to monitor progress and setbacks.

10. Some participants noted the need to sign and ratify international treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and to ensure that enshrining gender equality in national constitutions became a priority. The topics of developing and implementing national strategies and action plans for gender equality, and of agreeing on lines of responsibility for those actions were also discussed.

Transforming institutions and creating enabling environments

11. The transformation of political institutions to ensure the achievement of gender equality was recognized as a priority for accelerating the implementation of the Platform for Action. There was agreement that transformed institutions required the equal participation of men and women at all levels, including in leadership

positions. Ensuring gender balance was seen as a first step towards more gender-sensitive legislation, policies and decisions.

12. Instituting gender mainstreaming strategies, gender budgeting and facilitating gender audits in public institutions were seen as critical steps in ensuring that institutions addressed gender equality concerns. Participants stressed the importance of developing tangible tools to incorporate gender equality concerns in the work of both public and private sector institutions. Dedicated mechanisms, such as women's caucuses, committees or networks of gender focal points, were seen as critical for entrenching gender mainstreaming and required access to sound gender analysis, research and sex disaggregated data.

13. Participants also noted the importance of partnerships of gender equality machineries and civil society organizations with other stakeholders. The need to support the coordination role of gender equality machineries and their mandate as catalysts for gender mainstreaming was stressed. The view was expressed that the full and effective participation of women required a link among parliament, Government and women's civil society organizations. Such organizations had been successful in keeping Governments accountable for gender equality actions and commitments. In some States, gender observatories had been established to measure and monitor progress and setbacks.

14. It was widely recognized, however, that institutional transformation would not be achieved unless responsibility for unpaid care work was shared between men and women. In many countries, women spent a disproportionate amount of time on childcare and household responsibilities. Encouraging women's paid work and providing universal childcare facilities were seen as critical in redressing that inequality. There was agreement upon the importance of women's economic independence and of a guarantee of decent work and equal pay for work of equal value.

15. Addressing the institutional environment in which women and men worked was also considered important in achieving gender equality. Some participants stressed the need to ensure that men and women were able to work together on issues of gender equality, in an environment free from sexual harassment and discrimination. A number of participants called for a paradigm shift to address the attitudinal barriers about women's roles. Participants were keen to promote role models of women in leadership positions, capable of managing resources.

Inclusive institutions

16. Participants stressed that women were not a homogenous group. To ensure the participation of the most marginalized women, they underlined the need to create consultative mechanisms and engage a diverse range of women. They also stressed the importance of addressing women's poverty and marginalization and noted that quotas had been a useful mechanism in overcoming intersecting forms of discrimination. There was a special focus on the importance of building the capacity of young women to advocate gender equality.

17. The importance of proposed sustainable development goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, and the need to incorporate gender equality into all sustainable development goals were highlighted. *Participants raised the issue of financing for gender equality to ensure the*

implementation of the sustainable development goals and, thereby, the full and equal participation of women in all areas and at all levels. The role of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) was noted as key in that process.

United Nations E/CN.6/2015/INF/4

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
16 March 2015

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session
9-20 March 2015
Agenda item 3
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Ministerial round table: accountability for realizing de facto equality for women and girls

Chair's summary

1. On 10 March 2015, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the topic "Accountability for realizing de facto equality for women and girls" under the overall theme "Priorities for future action to realize gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights of women and girls". The participants in round table focused on the sharing of national experiences, good practices and challenges related to ensuring accountability for gender equality commitments and the realization of women's human rights, particularly through the accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and in the post-2015 development agenda.

2. The Secretary-General of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, Betto Bättig, chaired the round table, and the Sex Discrimination Commissioner of Australia, Elizabeth Broderick, served as moderator. Ministers and high-level officials from 16 Member States participated in the interactive dialogue.

Strengthening national and international accountability mechanisms for gender equality

3. There was strong consensus among participants that effective national accountability mechanisms and institutions were critical for the implementation of national and international gender equality commitments. Participants noted the important roles of national gender equality machineries and national human rights institutions as mechanisms for monitoring and overseeing cross-sectoral responsibilities to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and realize women's human rights. A number of participants gave examples of the ways

15-04024 (E) 190315

Please recycle

in which independent regulatory bodies, such as equality and anti-discrimination ombudsmen, empower women to claim their human rights and seek redress for violations.

4. Many participants expressed concern, however, about the lack of political will and of financial and human resources available to institutions and mechanisms for promoting gender equality. Participants emphasized that such institutions and mechanisms must be properly resourced so that they may be responsive to the needs of women and girls and have the power and capacity to ensure compliance with commitments and obligations. Many participants stressed the crucial role of civil society, including women's rights organizations in holding Governments to account for gender equality and in advancing women's human rights.

5. A number of speakers noted the importance of using the Beijing Platform for Action and international human rights treaties and mechanisms to effectively influence the design of laws, policies and programmes. Participants acknowledged that reporting to international treaty bodies, such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and international processes, such as the universal periodic review of the Human Rights Council, strengthen government accountability for gender equality. Civil society shadow reporting, as well as public debates on State party reports, were highlighted as integral aspects of these accountability mechanisms.

Laws, policies and monitoring as central to accountability

6. A number of participants highlighted national action plans for gender equality that set clear targets and indicators and were regularly monitored as effective means by which to promote gender mainstreaming and ensure that all parts of government are responsible for achieving gender equality. Participants also identified increased coordination between gender equality machineries and executive, legislative and judicial bodies as key for ensuring accountability for gender equality by all State actors. A number of participants drew attention to the significant role that parliaments could assume in holding all ministries accountable for the implementation of gender equality action plans and commitments, including by conducting parliamentary fact-finding missions to assess government compliance. The equally important role of local authorities in implementing national action plans and ensuring accountability for gender equality was also noted by participants.

7. Participants highlighted the importance of being able to track the use of budget allocations from a gender perspective and the key role of financial oversight bodies tasked with monitoring government spending in accordance with gender equality action plans and commitments. Several countries reported the use of gender-responsive budgeting in their national budget cycles to support the effective and efficient allocation and spending of available resources to promote gender equality and recommended it as an important monitoring tool.

8. Persistent discrimination against women in the law was highlighted by a number of speakers as a major obstacle to the enjoyment by women and girls of their human rights. At the same time, ministers reported on progress in reforming legal and policy frameworks, including the introduction or strengthening of gender equality legislation, constitutional amendments to guarantee gender equality and non-discrimination, policies to advance women's economic empowerment and the introduction of quotas to increase women's participation in political and

decision-making bodies. Speakers agreed that all remaining discriminatory laws must be removed.

9. Several participants stressed the importance of reporting and evaluation as tools to promote accountability at the national, regional and international levels. It was noted that, in order to be truly accountable for realizing gender equality and the human rights of women and girls, constant reviews and evaluations of the impact of laws, policies and programmes were imperative. By conducting reviews and evaluations, problems could be identified and adjustments made in order to deliver results and benefits for all women and girls. High-quality data were seen as crucial for effectively monitoring progress and their collection should be a priority.

Increasing private sector accountability for gender equality

10. A number of participants stressed the importance of ensuring private sector accountability for gender equality and the need to monitor the impact of the private sector on gender equality and the enjoyment by women of their human rights. One approach was to create incentives for the private sector, for example by underscoring that, in addition to being a human rights issue, advancing gender equality could be good for business.

11. Participants highlighted that, as power in the private sector had historically been in the hands of men, involving men in efforts to increase the number of women in leadership positions in the private sector was critical. One initiative involved requesting male chief executive officers to use their positions of influence to support women in building their leadership skills and to commit to publicly report on progress made towards specific targets. Participants also suggested that parliaments had an important role to play in making the private sector more accountable, for example by forming specialized parliamentary oversight committees. A good practice was the establishment of a quota of 40 per cent for women on the boards of publicly traded companies. Multi-stakeholder accountability frameworks involving the government, civil society and the private sector were also suggested as successful means to increase private sector accountability.

12. Speakers gave examples of successful collaborative partnerships to promote accountability for the advancement of women's human rights, including within the private sector, such as the establishment of a formal memorandum of understanding between the private sector, civil society and the prime minister that focused on increasing women's participation on the boards of private companies. A multi-stakeholder cooperation initiative to promote accountability included programmes and initiatives to promote women's economic empowerment and financial independence through regional trainings and the formation of agreements between businesses, educational institutions and various levels of government at the regional, national and local levels.